

IVORYTON VILLAGE

STRATEGIC PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT

Prepared for the Essex Planning Commission



Draft Dated: April 9, 2009

Ivoryton Village Strategic Planning Sub-Committee Report

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Executive Summary

The mission of the Ivoryton Village Strategic Planning Sub-Committee was to prepare a viable plan of economic and community development for Ivoryton Village consistent with the Town Plan of Conservation and Development. The sub-committee members consisted of local residents and those who serve on Town of Essex commissions and boards. Their collaborative participation, in addition to input from the community, stimulated a creative consensus of opinion. The primary issues considered were economic development, village design criteria, environmental (sewage disposal) issues, parking and potential zone changes. Of specific interest were recommendations to improve the economic base and overall attractiveness of Ivoryton Village while creating an interesting place to live, walk, eat, shop, attend theater/library/park events, and conduct business.

To address improvements to the overall attractiveness of Ivoryton Village, it is recommended a comprehensive landscaping plan be commissioned that encourages street trees and decorative fencing to "complete" the gaps in the streetscape. The landscape plan is an item that can be undertaken first and does not preclude the additional redevelopment plans for Ivoryton to improve its economic base. The key site for new development is the lot adjacent to the service station (114 Main St.); recommend potential acquisition and/or a public-private redevelopment partnership to develop the land in such a way as to allow a two-story building on the street and parking in the rear. Further, approval of the proposed Ivoryton Village Zone would facilitate and encourage mixed-use in the commercial zone in existing structures with two floors (i.e., affordable housing), convert multiple zoned properties to a single zone designation, permit construction of structures close to the street line, and begins to address the preservation of historic features and design styles to maintain Ivoryton Village's charm & character.

Wastewater treatment capacity is viewed as the single largest impediment to further economic growth in Ivoryton Village. In evaluating septic systems within the select village area it was determined that there is limited available space for a change; whether for repairs or new installations. Primary among the recommendations is for the Town to fund a study of Ivoryton Village's sewage disposal systems by utilizing \$17,000 currently in the Essex facilities study grant pre-1998 fund, matched by town funds of approximately \$13,000. The Town should also consider the merits of: 1) a shared community septic system between the Pratt Read Factory and Ivoryton Village, and 2) an innovative and potentially grant-funded research project recommended by Dennis Greci of the DEP to construct a green roof on the Pratt Read Factory which would be sprayed with cleaned up sewage.

The current nonconforming parking issues are addressed in the proposed Ivoryton Village Zone by encouraging compact commercial and office development that more effectively utilizes shared parking and requires parking for new development or change in uses be located on the side or back of buildings, not on the street. The proposed zone includes a provision for the elimination of on-site parking requirements if adequate municipal or shared parking can be identified. To address the need for additional parking, the optimum solution is to purchase and develop the service station's open lot with an expanded rear parking lot that incorporates the abutting Playhouse lot. But due to the uncertainty of the lot's future ownership and its suitability for development, the Town should also consider the use of a portion of the Moeller Instrument property for public parking and access to the abutting Playhouse lot for expanded public parking. In addition, investigate the possibility of additional shared public parking on existing lots with the owners of the former Isobel's, Ivoryton Inn, Burdick property, and/or the Pratt Read Factory.

Ivoryton Village Strategic Planning Sub-Committee Report

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I. Sub-Committee Mission Statement

The mission of the Ivoryton Village Strategic Planning Sub-Committee was to prepare a viable plan of economic and community development for Ivoryton Village center consistent with the Town Plan of Conservation and Development.

The primary issues the sub-committee considered were village design criteria, environmental (septic) issues, parking and potential zone changes. Of specific interest were recommendations to improve the economic base and overall attractiveness of Ivoryton Village while creating an interesting place to live, walk, eat shop, attend theater/library/park events, and conduct business.

II. Members of the Ivoryton Village Strategic Planning Sub-Committee

The Town of Essex Planning Commission formed the Ivoryton Village Strategic Planning Sub-Committee in December 2007. The membership consisted of local residents and those who serve on Town of Essex commissions and boards. Their collaborative participation, in addition to input from the community, stimulated a creative consensus of opinion. The Sub-Committee consisted of the following members:

Planning Commission - Alan Kerr (Chairman)/Linda Herman (Vice-Chairman)
Economic Development Commission – John Beveridge/David Winsted
Conservation Commission – Douglas Demarest
Essex Land Trust – Bill Grover (also Centerbrook Architects)
Historical Society – Ron Noe
Tree Warden – Augie Pampel
Zoning Commission – Ken Wexler
Ivoryton Residents – Susan Beckman/Chet Arnold
Realtor – Pat Callahan

Invited Guests included:

Town Selectmen – Phil Miller, Norm Needleman, Vincent Pacilleo
Town Zoning Enforcement Officer – Marion Staye
Town Sanitarian – Carol Lord
Town Engineer – Bob Doane
Town Planner – John Guskowski
Engineer – Brian Curtis of Nathan L. Jacobson & Associates
Ivoryton Playhouse – Jackie Hubbard/Norm Needleman
Ivoryton Librarian- Robbie Storm
Pratt Read Piano Factory owner – Tom Briggs
Moeller Instruments owner – Jeff Mertz
Ivoryton Store owner – John Blake

III. Geographical Location & Limits of Ivoryton Village Study

Ivoryton Village, for the purposes of this study, consisted of the area currently designated as a commercial zone in the zoning regulations. This area is generally bounded by Ivory Street to the east, the firehouse to the north, Moeller Instruments to the west, and the Falls River to the south (see "A" below) and is connected by Main Street to the Pratt Read Factory, which is zoned for mixed use. Although the Pratt Read Factory is outside this district, it was included in the study due to its overall impact to the Ivoryton Village center. See the map below.



Map of the Ivoryton Village Commercial District & Pratt Read Factory

IV. Brief History of Ivoryton Village

Ivoryton is one of three villages located in the Town of Essex, CT which is part of Middlesex County. Ivoryton was originally part of the Saybrook colony established in 1635. Samuel Merritt Comstock, born in town, founded Comstock, Cheney & Co. with his partner George A. Cheney in 1862 and was responsible for making Ivoryton a "Factory Town" by turning it into the ivory and piano parts center of the United States. His inventive mind, coupled with the availability of an efficient power source in the Falls River, led to the formation of one of the first "modern" factory systems in the lower valley. This company became the most important social and economic influence in the lower valley and its success led to the need for low cost labor. As a result, around the turn of the century many immigrants from Italy and Poland came to Ivoryton to work for Comstock, Cheney & Co. Ivoryton developed a culture where the factory and the village were intertwined. Comstock, Cheney & Co. built what is now the Ivoryton

Playhouse as a meeting hall for factory workers, a grammar school for the community, helped build the Ivoryton Library, and erected a great number of housing units for its employees. The houses built here after the Civil war reflected the influence and affluence of the village. Perhaps the most culturally significant homes in town were built in Ivoryton during the 1890 to 1920 era. East Main Street, entering Ivoryton from Centerbrook, was considered "Victorian Row" with the houses along this street owned by executives or stockholders of Comstock, Cheney & Co. The great majority of these homes remain today, although most have been substantially altered. The factory homes on Blake, Oak, Walnut, and Chestnut Streets as well as Comstock Avenue provide a further glimpse into the past.

In order to survive the Great Depression in the 1930's, Comstock, Cheney & Co. combined with its main competitor, Pratt, Read & Co. from the neighboring town of Deep River and took its name. During World War II, gliders were produced for the U. S. government at this factory, and for a few years after the war, the demand for piano keyboards and actions kept this factory busy. By the end of the 1950s however, Pratt, Read & Co. was forced to move a great deal of its production to a facility it opened in the town of Central, South Carolina. All of the Comstock, Cheney & Co. property was disposed of after World War II.

V. Current Makeup and Uses Within Ivoryton Village

Ivoryton Village remains a small-scale village with approximately eighteen (18) business and residential properties located in the Commercial District. The businesses consist of the Ivoryton Playhouse, Ivoryton Inn, Ivoryton Library, Burdick Oil Company, Moeller Industries, an answering service, barbershop, firehouse, gas/service station, gift shop (closed), photography business, restaurant, and tavern. In addition there are a handful of residential properties. There is great potential in Ivoryton but the lack of appropriate septic and adequate public parking prohibits Ivoryton from growing and thriving to its fullest potential (*See Appendix E*).

Development in this area is currently regulated by the Town of Essex Zoning Regulations, and includes sections that address Commercial Districts, Water Resource Districts, Off-Street Parking and Truck Loading Space, Signs and Lights, Alcoholic Beverages, and Conditions of Certain Special Exceptions.

The uses currently permitted in this district are single-family houses with or without apartments, home-based businesses, and 1,800 sq.ft. offices and retail stores. Other uses are permitted as outlined in the regulations, but by Special Exception. The additional requirements of the Water Resource District II appropriately do not permit truck terminals, gas stations, car washes, and auto repair shops, as well as a few other restrictions such as landfills. The general requirements are minimum lot sizes of 30,000 sq.ft., with a maximum of 15% building coverage and 65% improved area. The minimum lot width is 150' with setbacks of 30' at the front and rear and 15' at the side.

The 2005 Plan of Conservation and Development (PoCD) for the Town of Essex addresses this area and makes general provisions to guide decisions on Special Exception approvals. It encourages revising the commercial district regulations to reflect the distinctive character of the village and develop standards that encourage or require parking in the rear of the buildings, shared parking, construction of structures close to the street line with sidewalks and pedestrian friendly amenities. Predicting the required parking for commercial uses is often

difficult and the 2005 PCD recommends developing shared parking regulations in conjunction with compact commercial development. It also recommends revising landscaping and site plan standards for all commercial zones to provide more landscaping, and detailed information on site plans. Architectural elevations and contextual information should be included to provide information on the overall design in relation to existing development. In general, the plan recommends protecting the scenic quality of Ivoryton while allowing a mix of commercial and residential development.

As part of the design planning for the Ivoryton Village district, the 2005 Plan of Conservation and Development further suggests the following: Beyond providing “local” retail and services, Ivoryton might be considered as an antiques and arts destination. Ivoryton’s charm is its location “off-the-beaten path”, its rich architectural heritage and its relationship to the Falls River. Advantage should be taken of all of this. To be viable for retail, Ivoryton needs an additional “draw”; to be a destination. Ivoryton should capitalize on the significant “critical mass” of antique and art shops in the lower Connecticut River Valley.

As of the July 2007 Census for the Town of Essex, the population increased by 3.7% since 2000 with 6,505 people to 6,753; of which 3,562 (52.7%) were females and 3,191(47.3%) were males. The median resident age was 43.4 years old. The estimated median household income was \$81,495 and the estimated median house or condo value was \$434,989. There are no comparable village-level statistics available for the Ivoryton area.

VI. Ivoryton Village Study Process

During 2008, the Ivoryton Village Strategic Sub-Committee met once a month for 10 months but did not meet in November and December due to the holidays. They met once a month in January through June 2009 to finalize the report and present it to the Planning Commission. The work of the sub-committee during this time period can be summarized as follows:

A. Identify Ivoryton Village Assets and Liabilities

The following assets were identified at the first meeting and determined to be factors or resources that help make the Ivoryton Village community a success in terms of a place to live, work, and raise a family:

- Important venue for civic life, parades and special events
- Rich theater, drum core, and ivory history
- Proximity to Rt. 9 and I-95
- New Mill Race Trail runs from Walnut Street to Ivory Street
- Period lighting, new and improved sidewalks connecting Bushy Hill to Ivoryton Center



Ivoryton Playhouse



Mill Race Trail

The following liabilities were also identified and determined to be factors or stumbling blocks that detract from the present or future success of the community:

- Businesses experiencing a decline in recent years
- Septic systems restricting future growth
- Parking limitations
- Lack of sufficient dining opportunities and a local convenience store
- Need for a local gathering location for the local youth and elderly

B. Meet with the Town of Essex Sanitarian, Zoning Enforcement Officer, and Town Engineer and Identify Ivoryton Village Specific Goals Within Town Commission Plans and Study *(See Appendix D)*

Invited guests at the February 2008 meeting included the Town of Essex Sanitarian Carol Lord, the Zoning Enforcement Officer Marian Staye, and the Town Engineer Robert Doane. Ms. Lord distributed copies of information including a comprehensive history of the existing septic systems in Ivoryton Village, GIS maps denoting the location of septic tanks, leaching areas, septic pipes under the street, the flood plain, and documentation from the 1991 Fuss and O'Neill Study. She also noted examples of community septic systems may be seen at Essex Meadows, Chester Village West, and the Clinton and Westbrook Malls.

With assistance provided by Janice Ehle-Myer, Representative from the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency (CRERPA), the sub-committee analyzed the business tax base within Ivoryton Village over a ten-year period (Appendix F) and determined that even with the turnover of businesses, assessed property values maintained a healthy increase of approximately 50% to the grand list. The sub-committee was also provided an overview of town-wide or Ivoryton-specific goals within the 2005 Town Plan of Conservation and Development, the 2005 Economic Development Commission Action Strategy, and the 1994 Ivoryton Center Planning Study from which they selected the following as relevant for this study:

Economic Revitalization & Zoning:

- Revise the Zoning regulations to facilitate & encourage mixed-use development in the commercial zone in existing structures with two floors.
- Convert multiple zoned properties to a single zone designation.
- Encourage or require construction of structures close to the street line
- Integrate affordable housing into the Town's regulations; preferably constructed near transit services.
- Revise landscaping & site plan standards for the commercial zone to provide more landscaping and information on site plans.
- Preserve the character of historic features and employ historic design styles to maintain Ivoryton Village's charm & character.
- Explore the creation of a demolition ordinance restricting destruction of historic structures w/conditions outlined for significant renovation or demolition.

Sewage Disposal Systems:

- Develop full use of existing facilities while continuing to pursue an active sewer avoidance program.
- Determine feasibility of small treatment systems dedicated to the village area.

- Review problems with septic & develop creative solutions.

Parking & Traffic:

- Conduct a comprehensive traffic and parking study.
- Maintain municipal parking and explore opportunities for shared parking.
- Promote remote parking with shuttle bus service to Ivoryton Village and expand the service for moving tourists within the nine-town region.
- Break up large areas of asphalt & provide shade trees to minimize heat islands.
- Encourage sidewalks and pedestrian friendly amenities
- Promote use of bicycles as an alternative transportation source. Plan bike trails and lanes with consideration of linking to mass transit.
- Apply for federal transportation funding to install bus shelters in appropriate locations.

C. Public Forum and Stakeholder Interviews

The sub-committee held a public forum at the Ivoryton Playhouse in March 2008 to hear from business owners and individuals who have a stake in or may be impacted by recommendations developed through the strategic planning process. About 60 community members attended. After members of the sub-committee reviewed the goals of the strategic plan, stakeholders were invited to share their views on the most important actions and improvements to ensure a healthy economic future for the village, the village's existing infrastructure, environmental concerns, septic issues, parking and traffic issues, public parks, and recreational resources.

In addition to the public forum, the sub-committee invited business owners to its monthly meetings; i.e., Pratt Read Factory, Moeller Instruments, Ivoryton Playhouse, Ivoryton Store, and the former Isobel's. Unfortunately, attempts to reach the owner of the Ivoryton Inn were unsuccessful as he resides out-of-state.

D. Meet with Brian Curtis of Nathan L. Jacobsen Associates, Consulting Engineers

Brian Curtis of Nathan L. Jacobson Associates met with the sub-committee in April 2008 and noted that by current standards anyone requesting a change in use on their property must first have a health code compliant septic system as the Town of Essex Sanitarian is bound by the standards of the public health code. This requirement has created a situation making it difficult for people to do anything with their properties. While discussing the limitations of the potential locations for a community septic system within the center of Ivoryton Village, Mr. Curtis suggested looking at the soil maps of property in the area for natural soils on which a system might be installed. He further clarified for the sub-committee that the DEP will allow you to import fill when the existing soil is unsuitable as long as it is placed in a certain manner and meets certain specifications. He cited as an example that the original soils at Chester Village West were not suitable and fill was imported. Their system was built in 1990 at a cost of \$1 Million.

Mr. Curtis estimated that the cost for a community septic system that can handle 10,000 to 15,000 gallons per day to be upwards of \$2 Million. The treatment plant consists of an

underground filter with a small utility building for mechanicals. In a conventional system maintenance is very low and very economical. The operation of a treatment plant requires a licensed operator to monitor the plant three days per week. The cost could run \$40-80,000 per year depending on how complex the system is. The cost per month was \$2,000-\$3,000 for monitoring and operations of the system at the YMCA in Westbrook. Of course, there is an added cost for the sewer line as the installation moves farther away from a business.

E. Report on Rob Simmons Meeting and Formation of Focus Study Groups

During the May 2008 meeting, Ken Wexler, Alan Kerr and Susie Beckman reported on their meeting with former U.S. Congressman Rob Simmons on April 27, 2008. Mr. Simmons appears to be tuned in to the concerns of this sub-committee including the septic issues within Ivoryton Village. Mr. Simmons recommended contacting the Long Island Sound Fund & Clean Water Fund (part of CT DEP) for septic funding. He also thought the Council of Small Towns (COST) of which Essex is a member, could provide general help in our effort to revitalize Ivoryton Village. He also recommended contacting Michael Blair from Pequot Properties who was closely involved in the rehabilitation of the American Velvet Factory in Stonington.

Within the sub-committee, members formed three focus groups to better concentrate their efforts on the three main issues impacting Ivoryton Village as listed below:

- 1) Economic Revitalization Focus Group - comprised of John Beveridge, Ron Noe, Augie Pampel, and Ken Wexler
- 2) Sewage Disposal Focus Group - comprised of Chet Arnold, Bill Grover, Linda Herman, and David Winsted
- 3) Parking Focus Group - comprised of Susan Beckman, Doug Demarest, and Alan Kerr

F. Site Walk of Ivoryton Village Commercial District *(including the Pratt Read Factory)*

In June of 2008, members conducted a walking tour of Ivoryton Village in an effort to better understand the issues facing each of the properties. Of particular interest was identifying potential locations for redevelopment, a community septic system, and additional parking.

The new owner of the Pratt Read Factory is interested in developing the property with mixed uses but is restricted by the current septic system and lack of alternative septic location as observed during the walk. The Ivoryton Inn and its restaurant were closed at the time but a few rooms for rent were expected to receive approval. Zoning and septic issues restrict use of the Inn. The Burdick property has potential remediation issues and is restricted by zoning and septic issues. The open space next to the service station also has potential remediation issues and is restricted by zoning; it needs a plan for a better use.

G. Ivoryton Village Visioning Workshop

During the July 2008 meeting, focus groups reported their progress and members discussed the elements of an "ideal" village to assist with the creation of a vision for the Ivoryton Village center. Recommendations for improvement include:

- Seek activities designed to both stimulate and revitalize the village economy.

- Identify desired businesses to recruit and locations for commercial expansion.
- Encourage village center revitalization through streetscape improvements, retail development, office uses, and apartment units above businesses.
- Determine most desirable commercial and residential development and location.
- Recommend zone changes that facilitate affordable housing in the village.

H. Review *Draft Ivoryton Village Center Zone* and Meet With the Owner of the Pratt Read Factory

During the meetings for the months of August through October 2008 the focus groups reported on their progress and worked with Marian Staye, the Town of Essex Zoning Enforcement Officer, to review and revise the proposed Ivoryton Village Zone. In addition, at the August 2008 meeting Tom Briggs, the owner of the Pratt Read Factory, provided an overview of his development plans for the factory. He shares the Town's development visions for his property and was open to future discussions with the Town.

I. Prepare and Present Final Report

The following schedule for preparing and presenting the final report was prepared at the January 2009 meeting and is listed as follows:

- Representatives from each of the focus groups met to prepare a draft report *(February 2009)*
- Comments incorporated and a final draft report prepared by Linda Herman, Alan Kerr, and Town Planner John Guskowski *(March 2009)*
- Final draft report presented to the Ivoryton Village Sub-Committee *(April 2009)*
- Comments incorporated and meet with stakeholders for presentation of final report *(May 2009)*
- Final report presented jointly to the Planning and Zoning Commissions, the EDC, Selectmen, and invited State Representatives *(June 2009)*
- Any changes incorporated in the report and submitted to the Planning Commission *(July 2009)*

VII. Analysis of Main Issues Impacting Ivoryton Village

A. Economic Revitalization Analysis

The parcel-by-parcel analysis of the business and non-profit properties within Ivoryton Village and the Pratt Read Factory are as follows: *(Note: As discussed at great length in this report, sewage disposal and parking issues must also be addressed if the recommendations listed here are to be successful)*

- Gather (104 Main St.) - is a great asset to the community and a landmark structure. Should continue to use as retail and service space(s).
- Ivoryton Library (106 Main St.) - is a great asset to the community and a landmark structure. Should continue in its current use.
- Burdick Office Property (108 Main St.) – continue as office space, however, it appears service businesses and/or modest retail could also work.

- The Service Station (114 Main St.) – While it could stand some aesthetic “upgrading”, it is very appropriate in its village environment in terms of scale and architecture. It provides an important service to the community and should remain as such.
- Lot adjacent to the service station – Probably the key site in the village for new development.
- Maggie’s Luncheonette (107 Main St.) – should remain in present use, very appropriate for the location.
- Former Liquor Store/Vogl Center (6 Summit St.) – appropriate use would appear to be small-scale retail similar to previous liquor store or office use.
- Ivoryton Tavern (8 Summit St.) – should definitely remain in present use along with the other restaurant in the village to serve the community in a very important way.
- Burdick Property (18 Summit St.) – Best use would appear to be to remain as a commercial or parking site. It has aesthetic and may have environmental challenges.
- The Ivoryton Playhouse (103 Main St.) - is a tremendous asset to the community and a landmark structure. Should continue in its current use.
- Moeller Instrument Property (126 Main St.) – Originally it was thought to be an excellent prospect for adaptive reuse. Plenty of room for parking, continued use as a small-scale manufacturing, office space, and even condominiums. Views of the Falls River behind the structure are magnificent and are a great asset to the site. In speaking with the owner, he is not interested at this time in converting any portion of the building to residential and believes the structure will not support it.
- Ivoryton Inn (115 Main St.) – Although historic to the village, the architectural qualities of this building are not representative of the period. The structure is in poor condition and may likely prove too costly to bring up to current code to make it appropriate for re-use. A redevelopment project on this site could provide new multifamily or commercial uses.
- Pratt Read Factory – *(NOTE: This property is outside of the study zone, but is so crucial to the village area as a potential second node of development that it was included in this analysis).* The site contains a multitude of buildings of various sizes, configurations, and architectural design. It has plenty of room for parking, and the Falls River runs behind the factory for its entire length, affording an incredible site amenity. The complex ought to be developed as a “destination site”. Fortunately, the new owner appears to have a vision of a mixed-use complex as recommended in the PoCD. The two multi-story brick structures on the western side of the site would make a great apartment/condominium complex. They are very similar to the very successful Piano Factory building in Deep River and they should lay out in a similar fashion. Other structures would lend themselves to manufacturing, retail, arts and antiques, and office space. A high-end restaurant in this location, particularly if placed in one of the buildings on the Falls River, would appear to be very appropriate. As with the Moeller and Ivoryton Inn properties, code compliance, hazardous material abatement, and environmental issues may be a challenge on this site.

Analysis of the residential properties concluded in general that the village has many wonderful single-family homes located between the center of the village and the Pratt Read Factory. Most are either of the “colonial” or “Victorian” era and style and are in good repair. Over time, with a successful revitalization of the village, property values will be such that upgrades to those residences in need of restoration and repair will be viable. Multi-family

housing development should be considered in locations as outlined above. This housing would be of particular interest to young singles and empty nesters; affording them the ability to remain and/or move to this area of town. Consider allowing residences to have a home office or other small business (e.g., artist studio) within the house itself or in the garage. Adopt standards to ensure that non-residential uses are small-scale and in keeping with the neighborhood character.

Ivoryton Village is fortunate to have important buildings, the park, and an abundance of trees and other vegetation. The magnificent natural asset of the Falls River and the new linear park/nature preserve, owned by the Essex Land Trust, running along and behind Main Street not only provides a great natural and scenic setting, but also links the Pratt Read Factory to Ivoryton Village.

B. Sewage Disposal Systems Analysis

Wastewater treatment capacity is seen by both the sub-committee and the majority of stakeholders as the single largest impediment to further economic growth in Ivoryton Village. As noted, Ivoryton Village grew up around the ivory factory, which was powered by the Falls River. Thus, the village is located adjacent to the Falls River and its related wetlands, and the area is dominated by floodplain and wetland soils that are largely unsuitable for large septic systems. Essex Town Sanitarian Carol Lord and Brian Curtis from Nathan L. Jacobson & Associates (an authority on wastewater issues) both made presentations before the sub-committee. There are approximately eighteen (18) business and residential properties located in the Ivoryton Village Commercial District. The current total water usage for this district is estimated at 4,050 gallons per day; which varies widely depending on the amount of use at the Playhouse, the Inn, and Moeller Instrument properties. Most do not meet existing codes, several have shared septic systems, and none of the systems have room for expansion.

Although this current situation is largely out of compliance with modern state health codes (as enforced at the local level by the Town Sanitarian), at its present low level of activity everything seems to be working adequately and there is no evidence of septic-related problems. However, should the use or intensity of use change on any of the key downtown properties, state law would require that the septic systems be upgraded to current state standards, which in many cases would be impossible given the small property sizes and inadequate soil conditions. This poses a very difficult problem for expansion or enhancement of current village businesses. As a final note: “package plant” small treatment facilities (such as are in use in East Haddam village) are not possible, because discharge from such treatment plants to the Falls River is forbidden by state law due to the rating of the Falls River as an “A” quality stream. Estimates of existing flow as well as potential capacity needs at “build out” are presented in *Appendix B*.

In evaluating the select village area it was determined that there is limited available space for a change in septic systems; whether it is to repair an existing system or install a new one. Lot sizes are well under an acre and the buildings in the village center are too close to one another. However, as part of the study the septic sub-group decided to estimate the septic capacity that would be needed if the village were developed along the lines of the recommendations made by the economic revitalization focus group (Pages 8 -10). Based on those proposed uses and applying the health code to those uses, Town Sanitarian Carol Lord estimated a total of 18,370 gallons per day of septic capacity (*See Appendix C*) that would be

needed. The focus group added to that estimate 1,550 gpd for the Library, former Isobel's, the luncheonette, the rooming house, the tavern, the former liquor store/Vogl center, and 4,200 gpd for the Pratt Read Factory (*See Appendix B*). To identify any potential locations for a system handling this type of capacity, the sub-committee performed a site walk and initial evaluation of properties within the village area and surrounding properties. Their findings are as follows:

- The open space next to the service station has substantial environmental issues and is suspected of being dominated by fill, which may make it unable to support a community septic system under the health code.
- The open space owned by the Ivoryton Playhouse behind the service station parking lot is close to wetlands and was also filled in with sand possibly making it unsuitable for a community septic system.
- The park located next to the Playhouse has two small tributaries that run through the middle of the park near a buried old school foundation making it unsuitable for a community septic system.
- Gather has an apartment on the second floor and based on the health code the current septic system limits the available water usage for the first floor space.
- The Burdick property behind the firehouse may contain contaminants from former uses and may be difficult to use for a community septic system because the waste would have to be pumped up hill. Further evaluation is recommended
- Based on preliminary discussions, the parking lot next to the firehouse is thought to be a challenging option because waste would have to be pumped up hill. Further evaluation is recommended.
- The Moeller property has a shared septic system and cannot support expanded use. The DEP's re-classification of the Falls River behind this building will not allow direct discharge of wastewater effluent to the stream. The DEP determined no other area on the property is suitable for sub-surface potable wastewater disposal.

In search of innovative solutions, the following properties outside the village area were considered for community septic systems and determined not to be feasible:

- Initiated at the request of Mr. & Mrs. Libby, Brian Curtis (*from Nathan L. Jacobson & Associates*) inspected their property located across from the Pratt Read Factory. In Mr. Curtis' opinion, the portion of the property located close to the road is not adequate for a community septic system due to distance from curb restrictions and proximity of the water table. The rear portion of the property is unsuitable due to soil content and extensive ledge. The Essex Town Engineer may wish to further evaluate this property.
- Comstock Park is bordered on three sides by streams, the ground water level is high and it is located in the 100-year flood plain. It is highly unlikely the DEP would approve a septic system in this location.
- The Baroni property off Pond Meadow Road may offer some possibility if available, but it is located a long distance from the village.
- The Ingram property on the east side of Main Street has deed restrictions and is located uphill of the village area.
- The Deep River Fife & Drum property may be cost prohibitive to pump waste up-hill.

C. Parking Analysis

The Zoning Enforcement Officer Marian Staye noted that per the current zoning regulations for parking, most businesses in Ivoryton Village are nonconforming. In order to conform, they would have to provide a total of approximately 470 on-site parking spaces (estimate excludes the Pratt Reed Factory, Firehouse & Post Office). This zoning requirement far exceeds the estimated peak parking demand of 272 spaces and estimated current available parking of 200 spaces.

The Ivoryton Playhouse, a non-profit organization, is located in the heart of Ivoryton Village and produces 8 to 12 plays and musicals each year. Their evening and weekend matinee performances generate a high parking demand within the village. Considered a non-conforming use, they provide two onsite parking spaces for staff and rely heavily on a privately owned lot across the street for their patrons in conjunction with available on-street parking. Of particular concern is the fact that the owner of the privately owned lot would like to sell his property and it is not known if the new owner(s) would continue to make parking available to the patrons of the Playhouse. The current owner has expressed a willingness to explore purchase options with the Town but is not currently willing to grant the Playhouse an access easement from Main Street to their open lot because it may affect the sale of his property.

The Ivoryton Playhouse was gifted property behind the gas station but does not have the necessary funds to develop it as a parking lot and engineer/construct a driveway off of Ivory Street. The cost of a driveway would be escalated due to its proximity to wetlands. John Blake, owner of the former Ivoryton Store building, has offered the use of his property on Ivory Street to help the Playhouse gain access to their lot behind the service station; however, it is unclear whether or not this is feasible and the expense remains an issue.

Peak parking demand within the village is estimated at 272 spaces and includes the following: Playhouse-75, Tavern-40, Park-25, Gather & apartment-19, beauty parlor-6, Ivoryton Inn-25, Moeller Instruments-25, Luncheonette, retail and apartments-20, Ivoryton Library-15, Burdick Oil/Studio-6, Gas station-6, former liquor store-6, and Burdick office-4.

Current available parking is estimated at 200 spaces and includes the following: Playhouse-2, Tavern-2, Park-7, Gather & apartment-3, beauty parlor-3, Ivoryton Inn-40, Moeller Instruments-25, Luncheonette, retail and apartments-16, Ivoryton Library-4, Burdick Oil/Studio-6, Gas Station and open lot-66, former liquor store-3, Burdick office-4, on Main Street in front of the Ivoryton Playhouse-7, and on Summit Street by the Playhouse-6. The Ivoryton Fire House has a private parking lot for emergency vehicles only. Beyond the Village center, there is parking available on Main Street across from the Ivoryton Inn for approximately six (6) spaces.

On the occasions when the Ivoryton Playhouse, Ivoryton Library, Ivoryton Tavern and/or Gather have functions at the same time, there is a significant parking issue in the Village and to everyone's dismay patrons from these establishments have been ticketed on Summit and Main Street.

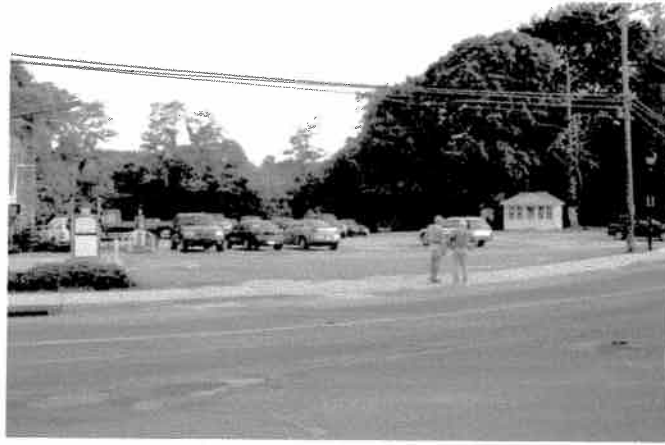
VIII. Recommendations Related to Main Issues

A. Economic Revitalization Recommendations

The Town of Essex should take special care to protect and restore the architectural heritage, natural resources, character and scale of Ivoryton Village, as it currently exists. Work with public and private entities (including community members, businesses, and the Town) to guide the development of the infrastructure necessary to support a vibrant community center for residents and visitors. For the success of future development, link the village with the Pratt Read Factory physically and visually on Main Street and by the “Millrace” Falls River linear park.

The Ivoryton Village area would benefit most greatly and most immediately from basic landscape improvements. It has been stated that the vacant lot next to the service station creates an unattractive gap in the streetscape similar to a smile with missing teeth. The lack of driveway delineation, street trees, benches, way finding signage, and other landscape features create a negative impression. Additional street trees from Walnut Street to Bushy Hill Road should be planted. Additional landscaping is needed between the former Ivoryton Store and the Library, between 108 Main Street and 6 Summit Street, and in front of the proposed structure on the lot adjacent to the gas station. A comprehensive landscaping plan should be commissioned for the Village center, either out of Town funds, grant, or potentially the assistance of the UConn Landscape Design program. Specifically, the landscaping plan should encourage street trees, and decorative fencing to “complete” the gaps in the streetscape. The landscape plan is an item that can be undertaken first and does not preclude the additional redevelopment plans for Ivoryton.

Ivoryton Village is a traditionally designed New England village that was created before the implementation of zoning, and thus has many features that are contrary to conventional zoning regulations. In order to preserve the traditional design of the village and to facilitate the establishment of new businesses, the sub-committee worked with Zoning Enforcement Officer Marian Staye to draft an Ivoryton Village Zone regulation for the Zoning Commission’s consideration. The draft regulation eliminates undesirable uses in the village, reduces front yard setbacks, eliminates dual zones on single pieces of property, reduces parking restrictions that discourage new businesses, eliminates the 10-customer seat limit on restaurants, and deletes the restriction of no restaurant on a corner lot. If this draft Ivoryton Village Zone is incorporated in the Zoning Regulations, the Zoning Commission should consider adding to it language that incorporates an architectural review (with well-defined objectives) in accordance with the Zoning Regulations, Section 130. “Conditions of Certain Special Exceptions”. In particular: 1) Section 130A.1 Architectural Design. The architectural design of buildings and signs, including the building materials, and exterior elevations, shall be of such character as to harmonize with the neighborhood and accomplish a transition in character between premises of dissimilar uses and improvements, and 2) Section 130A.2. Site Plan. The site plan, arrangement of buildings and other improvements, including landscaping, storm drainage, parking facilities shall be of such character as to harmonize with the neighborhood and accomplish a transition in character between premises of dissimilar uses and improvements.



Lot Adjacent to the Service Station

The key site in the village for new development is the lot adjacent to the service station. There is uncertainty about the future ownership and disposition of the service station and its open lot; however, the current owners (the Echtmans) have expressed a willingness to explore options with the Town. Several years ago the Town pursued purchasing the open lot through an application to the Connecticut Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) Grant Program that was subsequently denied. Due to potential environmental, wetlands and liability concerns before considering this option again, the Town should pursue a Phase 1 environmental site assessment (approx. cost of \$1,500 to \$2,500) and more importantly a Phase 2 environmental assessment (approx. cost of \$10,000 to \$30,000) that includes soil testing. The Phase 2 site assessment will provide the municipality important liability protections under federal and state law and will identify potential issues that may impact the property's redevelopment or reuse. Zoning issues will need to be addressed as the lot adjacent to the service station could not be subdivided from the larger parcel as it would not meet minimum lot size requirements. A regulation change or variance would have to be sought. If developable, the Town should consider a public-private redevelopment partnership to develop the land in such a way as to allow a two-story building on the street and parking in the rear as stated in the PoCD. Retail on the first floor and office space or an apartment on the second floor is recommended. A small-scale grocery store would be a great asset to the village as was the former Ivoryton Store. Architecture should be traditional in nature and allow the building to fit comfortably within its context. There would be parking in the rear to serve the new building, adjacent existing activities, and the Playhouse. This site is particularly barren and landscaping should be provided to complement any proposed development.

Additional recommendations include encouraging retail development to serve both local and tourist trade, avoid tourist attractions that would change the character of the town, maintain grand list balance tax base of 75% residential and 25% non-residential, and assess feasibility of putting public restrooms at the town park. Develop and implement an improvement plan for existing recreation areas (*See Appendix A*). Contact regional and state agencies such as CT Main Street Center, National Main Street Network, and Smart Growth that focus on downtown revitalization. Consider asking local architects to provide free storefront designs in an effort to beautify the village area.

B. Sewage Disposal Systems Recommendations

Given the findings as listed in VII.B above, further investigations are warranted into the feasibility of several properties in the area that remain possible sites for a community septic system. Consideration should also be given to locating sewage disposal system(s) under town owned roads outside of the village center (i.e., the area west of Ivory Street as suggested by the Town Engineer.) Primary among the recommendations is for the Town to fund a study of the Ivoryton sewage disposal systems by utilizing approximately \$17,000 currently in the Essex facilities study grant pre-1998 fund. This was the original grant under which Fuss & O'Neil prepared the wastewater management study. This is a 55%/45% grant and the DEP matched town funds 55 to 45. The \$17,000 could be matched by a maximum of \$13,000 in town funds to get \$30,000 for a further study of the Ivoryton sewage disposal system. This grant is monitored through the WPCA; presently Dennis Greci of the CT DEP is the contact person. An RFQ has been requested from Brian Curtis of Nathan L. Jacobson & Associates to provide as part of this report an estimate of what it will cost to further evaluate properties closer to Ivoryton Village. This is as an important step in determining if there are suitable properties/locations providing cost effective options.

The Town should consider the possibility of a shared community septic system between the Pratt Read Factory and Ivoryton Village. Due to limited on-site septic options, the owner of the Pratt Read Factory engaged the services of Brian Curtis (*from Nathan L. Jacobson & Associates*) to find an off-site septic location for his existing uses and planned expansion. It is possible that an amalgamation of several properties (back lots) could be created to allow the development of a community system subject to satisfactory negotiations with the neighbors.

A small step in the right direction, as recommended by the Town of Essex Sanitarian, would be for all restaurants to utilize air-cooled ice machines to significantly cut the use of water and thus sewage disposal demand.

An innovative recommendation by Dennis Greci of the DEP is to construct a green roof on the Pratt Read Factory and spray on it cleaned up sewage. It also has the potential of being a grant-funded project

C. Parking and Traffic Recommendations

A comprehensive transportation study for the Town of Essex is currently scheduled to begin in 2009. In addition to this study, the proposed Ivoryton Village Zone (if approved by the Zoning Commission) would encourage compact commercial and office development that more effectively utilizes shared parking. It would require new uses provide parking located on the side or back of buildings, not in front on the street. It also addresses current nonconforming uses with a provision that eliminates on-site parking requirements if adequate municipal or shared parking can be identified.

As stated earlier in the economic revitalization recommendations, the key site in the village for new development is the lot adjacent to the service station. The lot's proposed use includes a new building with a rear parking lot that could be expanded with the abutting open lot owned by the Playhouse. Viewed as the optimum parking solution, this new parking lot would be centrally located in the village and if thoughtfully designed could be relatively inconspicuous. Such parking would serve the new building, adjacent existing activities, and the Playhouse and would provide sufficient parking in the village during peak demand. Obstacles exist that may make this desirable outcome difficult to achieve as the ownership and lot's

suitability for development remain uncertain. It may also be difficult to find a developer interested in investing in this property, given the relatively depressed current state of the village and the nation's economic struggles. Accordingly, the following alternative may be less problematic and attainable in the short term and would address the need to secure suitable parking in the village.

Consistent with the comprehensive revitalization plan, facilitate a more village-like atmosphere by pursuing several smaller public parking lots dispersed outside the village center rather than one large parking lot in the middle as currently exists. One promising option (*with favorable interest from the owner*) is the use of a portion of the Moeller Instrument property for additional public parking. This property is fairly close to the center of the village and abuts the open lot owned by the Ivoryton Playhouse. Linking the two properties would provide the Playhouse direct access to their property from Main Street and permit additional public parking behind the service station's lot. The site is somewhat more distant from the Playhouse and other village businesses than the current parking lot. Perhaps a walking path for patrons and customers could be created behind the Ivoryton Library to gain access to Main Street and/or small carts (people movers) could serve patrons of the Ivoryton Playhouse. To complete this vision, additional shared public parking should be investigated on other sites in the village that may be suitable for public parking. These include the Burdick property on Summit Street, the Ivoryton Inn, and the former Isobel's parking area. There are also private residences in the village that may have open land suitable for parking. It should be stated that, in most cases, these additional options were not discussed with the property owners as part of this study.



Moeller Property



Playhouse Property



Former Isobel's



Ivoryton Inn

As offered by the owner of the Pratt Read Factory, consider using a portion of his property as shared parking for Ivoryton Village in conjunction with a trolley shuttle. If this option is pursued, follow-up on the EDC investigation to extend the trolley route to Ivoryton Village and the Pratt Read Factory rather than turning at the Ivoryton Congregational Church. In addition, the Mill Race walking path offers a pleasant and healthy alternate walking route to the village center.

Other recommendations include: 1) Consider making the intersection of Main Street, North Main Street, and Ivory Street a four-way stop to slow down traffic, 2) Consider an ordinance restricting parking to two hours in the village center, and 3) Install bicycle racks to promote bicycling in town.

IX. Financing and Marketing Recommendations

A. Financing & Agency Contact Recommendations

- 1) Town funding: Provide tax abatements where appropriate for existing properties in industrial/commercial zones where structures need to be renovated, upgraded or expanded.; consider business and sales tax credits and exemptions.
- 2) Local funding: Contact local lending institutions
- 3) Regional & State funding: Continue to pursue STEAP grants when they become available through the State of Connecticut.
- 4) Contact the following agencies for assistance: Economic & Manufacturing Assistance Act (MAA), CT Development Authority (CDA), CT Innovations (CI), Middlesex Chamber of Commerce, Counsel of Small Towns (COST) for which Essex is a member

B. Marketing and Promotional Strategies

- 1) Consult State Dept of Economic & Community Development to develop marketing and incentive programs to attract appropriate commercial, industrial, and retail activities in Ivoryton.
- 2) Through interviews with public & business owners, identify those characteristics that serve to promote Ivoryton as a place to do business. Determine the customer basis of the village retail core to help direct future efforts in marketing the area to village residents or visitors
- 3) Identify festivals and integrate into a regional tourism events calendar to help promote Ivoryton as a tourist destination (i.e., summer concerts, Pumpkin Festival, 4th of July parade, and Lighting of the Christmas Tree). Coordinate town activities with activities in other adjacent towns.
- 4) Generate a "Discover Ivoryton, CT" pamphlet similar to Deep River's listing the village businesses, walking trail, calendar of events, etc.
- 5) Create and maintain a website for Ivoryton Village promoting its products, services and events.

X. Special Recognition and Appreciation

The sub-committee would like to recognize and extend their appreciation to the following professionals for their valuable contributions to this report:

Carol Lord, Town of Essex Sanitarian
Marian Staye, Town of Essex Zoning Enforcement Officer
Robert Doane, Town of Essex Engineer
Brian Curtis, Consulting Engineer – Nathan L Jacobson & Associates, Chester, CT
John Guskowski, part-time Town Planner, CME Engineering
Stella Beaudoin, Town of Essex Recording Secretary
Janice Ehle-Meyer – CREPA Representative

They would also like to thank the Ivoryton Village & Pratt Read Factory business and property owners and general public for their interest and contributions to this study.

XI. Agency Contact Information

Robert Simmons, (former U.S. Congressman) CT Business Advocate – offered his services as a facilitator with the navigation of state agencies

John Simone, President & CEO – Connecticut Main Street Center, P.O. Box 261595, Hartford, CT 06126; Phone #(860) 280-2023; website: www.ctmainstreet.org

Mary Donohue, CT Commission on Culture and Tourism – for preservation programs

Chet Arnold, may be used as a contact for the UConn Landscape Design Program

XII. Appendix

- (A) Proposed Ivoryton Village Center Zone
- (B) Current Estimated Water Usage and Estimated Potential Sewage Disposal
- (C) Town Sanitarian Letters and Maps
- (D) Highlights of Commission Plans & 1994 Ivoryton Center Planning Study
- (E) List of Ivoryton Village District Properties
- (F) Comparison of Ivoryton Village's Business Taxes: Years 2007 & 1997